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A reading program developed to teach the minimum set of skills which enable children to recognize words as rapidly as possible through direct instruction in left-to-right orientation, blending, rhyming, and sounds is described. The materials for the program consist of teacher presentation notebooks used by the teachers in working with small groups and take-home materials which children complete in class and take home. These materials were first used with four groups of culturally disadvantaged kindergarten children at the University School, University of Illinois, who had IQ's ranging from 75 to 100. The materials were revised and reproduced for tryout by 30 teachers of 1,200 middle-class and disadvantaged children aged 3 to 14 who were mentally and educationally handicapped. To evaluate the program, the teachers were asked to complete objective and subjective evaluation sheets for each lesson and test. (NS)

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The Distar Reading Program

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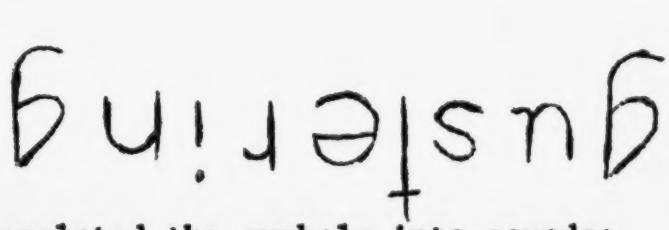
One of the strongest recommendations in Chall's recent book is that code emphasis programs should be the first step in beginning reading (1). Now we can expect much discussion of which skills to include in teaching to crack the reading code, why they should be included, and how they should be taught.

One way to decide upon a set of skills to be taught is to look at the terminal behavior, reading a word, and then to analyze the skills it took to read that word. Read this word and then analyze what you did.



1. You translated the symbols into sounds;
2. You read the word from right to left;
3. You said the word slowly or sounded it out, then probably consolidated the parts gus, guster, gustering;
4. You said it fast to get the finished word.

These are the essential skills to be taught to children so they can do what you just did.

The Distar program developed by Siegfried Engelmann and I teaches the minimum set of skills to enable children to crack the reading code as rapidly as possible. When the children start to read their first words (usually within the first or second month of instruction), and see the payoff for all the hard work, and take home a little book, proud of their accomplishment, and some adult or older sibling is impressed, the

children will work even harder to keep succeeding.

Rather than to develop the program with the "average" child who comes to school well prepared to learn the basic skills because he already possesses many of the subskills, our population for materials development was composed of culturally disadvantaged youngsters with I.Q.'s in the 75-100 range. When these children, who might fail to learn to read, learned to read well---one such group of these children achieved the 2.6 reading level at the end of their kindergarten year---we could credit our instructional method (2,3).

The Program (4)

Left to right orientation.

In the word me the first event of the sequence, m, is always positioned to the left of the second event of the sequence, e. We read gustering because we knew where to start the sequencing, but the naive child must be taught to sequence events and to symbolize the sequence in a fixed order. He must then read or translate the symbols into actions, just as the symbols m and e signal a reader to act by saying mmm and eeee.

We could teach him to sequence picture stories by ordering which event occurred first, but we might have to teach certain language and picture interpretation concepts. We could teach him to position a set of blocks similar to that of the teacher, but we might have to first teach shapes or colors. A good program should try to control the variables but the block task could depend on whether the teacher sits next to or across from the child when she instructs him to arrange his blocks just like hers. The language concept of "same as mine," might also have to be taught.

We teach the child to sequence a series of actions, to answer questions about what he did, and then to symbolize those actions and to "read" the symbols in the proper sequence.

1. There is a correct sequence. The teacher performs two actions, such as clapping her hands and slapping her lap with one hand. She says, "I'm doing it the right way. Do it with me."

2. When the children can perform the sequence, the teacher presents two incorrect actions and asks, "Is this the right way?"

3. The teacher also presents the correct actions in an incorrect sequence, such as slapping her lap first, and asks, "Is this the right way?"

4. After the children can do many similar tasks, they start to learn the terminology of first this; then this when the teacher performs the first part of a sequence and asks the children, "Then what did I do?" They get turns doing the first or second or third parts of the sequence to focus their attention on the role of an individual part in a sequence.

5. The arrow and the convention for following an arrow is demonstrated.

6. The teacher performs first a single action, then a series of actions and when the children have shown her what she did, she draws the actions on a series of faces appearing on an arrow.

7. The last exercises present a series of faces on arrows with different parts of the face, or hands on the face, indicating actions to be performed. The children read or translate the symbols into the appropriate series of actions, performing them

as they occur in time, on the arrow, from left to right.

These symbol-action games are a terminal exercise to show the child what reading will look like--paper printed with a series of symbols to signal a series of actions, occurring in a fixed order, from left to right, and appearing (as does our early reading material) on arrows.

Blending

1. Slow. As you blended, you knew that the slow version of gustering would still give you the same word when it was said fast. We must teach the child to hear this relationship,

so that later, when he sounds out words a part at a time, he will know that that series of parts which he sees and says, mmmmeeeee, are really the word me said slowly.

To teach the slow blending, or unblending, the teacher presents a normally spoken word in this type of task. "Listen: me, say it slow, mmmeee. Do it with me, mmmeee. Now you do it. Me, say it slow." After the children have said me slowly, the teacher asks, "What are you saying slow?" She then repeats "me, mmmeee," to show the fast-slow relationship.

2. Fast. To teach fast blending we orally present words divided into two parts or many parts and present the task, "Say it fast and I will show you the picture." The breaks in the whole words or the pauses between word parts replicate the natural pauses or hesitancies of the beginning reader, such as b..oy, m..oo..n, str..eet, f..a..m..i..l..y.

Isolated words to be blended lead into sentences and little stories read by the teacher with some words to be blended and a picture payoff. When the child starts to read, he sounds out the word a sound at a time, hears the slow version, and responds to the instruction "Say it fast," with a fast blend of those same sounds.

Rhyming. The rhyming exercises teach the children to focus on the parts of words that are similar, to hold part of a word constant and put different beginnings on the fixed endings.

In reading, words have parts that look the same; rhyming prepares for this by teaching that words sound the same.

The rhyming exercises are started with long words since there are more parts that remain constant. We see here one of the paradoxes in reading--in oral exercises long words are easier for the child to work with, but in written exercises it is far easier to deal with small words. Rather than elicit rhyme words, the children are presented with a word and words that rhyme with it. Then the child is given the first part of a series of rhyming words and asked to complete them. The tasks increase in difficulty as the children start to learn how to supply the missing parts of short rhyme words.

For example, the word "sat" is given and the words that rhyme with it. The child is then asked to "Rhyme with sat, ma..., ra..., fa..." When this is done, he is asked to "Rhyme with sat, m..., r...., f..."

The oral skills taught, blending and rhyming, and left to right sequencing will, after the initial set of sounds have been mastered, converge into reading words.

Sounds.

One of the major hangups with reading-troubled children is that they have been exposed to too many letter sounds, letter names, and letter symbols. To facilitate early sounding out of words, we have done the following:

1. A basic set of nine lower case letters were selected as the initial set to be learned because these letters combined readily into many words, and because they were not confusing aurally and, as we have shaped them, are easy to distinguish visually from each other. The children start to read with only these letters.

2. The letters are taught as "sounds," with each symbol making one and only one sound.

3. These sounds are "overlearned," that is the children become so familiar with responding to the visual symbol by giving its sound, that when the symbol is first presented in a word, it is immediately identified. Each of the sounds in the early reading stage has been repeated several hundred times.

4. The initial set of sounds in their order of presentation are: m, a (and), s, t (sat), f, d, r, i (in), th (this). These and all subsequent sounds are introduced at the rate of about two per week.

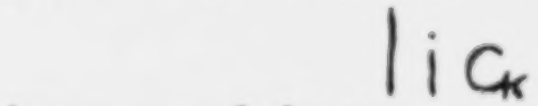
To prepare for the reading of sounds in words, the convention of sound sliding is taught. Since stop sounds will appear only at the end of words for a considerable period, the rule is taught that each sound is held for several seconds until the teacher points to the next sound and the next, with no pauses between sounds.

The first words appear in exercises called Reading Sounds,

one page of which always contains a series of rhyme words to be read. When a stop sound-first word is introduced, that word appears as the final word in a rhyme series where all the other words start with continuous consonants.

After the children have begun to sound out words, more sounds are introduced including c, o (ox), n, t, $\bar{a}$ (ate), h, u (up), g, l, w, sh. Based on these 20 sounds the children can start to read independently in story books of from one to 25 words. The books, once read, are theirs to keep.

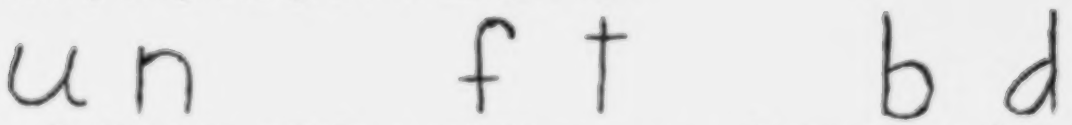
All words on the take home story books are spelled correctly. Until a sound has been learned, it will appear in the word, but in very small type. Gradually it assumes normal size, for example until k is taught, it looks like this in a word:



Appearance of the type

1. For the first two years, all books read by the children have letters ½ inch or larger.

2. To minimize visual confusion between certain pairs of letters, they are printed as follows:



3. Certain sounds initially appear as joined letters and are gradually separated into two distinct letters.

The Materials

Physical Description. The Distar Program consists of two sets of materials, teacher presentation notebooks and materials called "take homes" which the teacher awards to the children to complete in class and take home. The teacher presentation books are easel notebooks, held on the teacher's lap, as she works in her small group reading circle. There is a teacher presentation notebook for Blending, another for Sounds and one for the remaining oral tasks.

The teacher works with the children for several minutes daily in each of the presentation notebooks and several minutes with the take home materials for a total reading session of 20-30 minutes with several skills being taught each day. The teacher works in a presentation notebook until a colored page indicates the end of the lesson in that notebook and she then teaches from another notebook.

All statements to be made by the teacher, prompts, pacing, correction procedures, sufficient examples and instructional materials appear directly on the pages of the teacher presentation notebooks. One color and type of print contains instructions which the teacher reads to herself, another type print and color indicates statements she is to read aloud directly to the children in the instructional setting.

How the Materials do the job

1. Praise. The teacher reads her "part" from her note-books. She is given statements to make such as "Good, you said m," "That was good remembering," "You are smart, I can't fool you today," "That was hard work, but you did a good job" and she is told when to make those statements.

2. Corrections. The teacher is told when and how to correct. In the Reading Sounds for example, she is instructed to tap the incorrectly identified sound, say the correct sound herself and then tell the children to return to the beginning of the word, and say the sounds again before she tells them to "Say it fast."

3. Pacing. The teacher teaches only those pages indicated as comprising a lesson. The suggested schedule for the first several weeks consists of 3 minutes of symbol and action games, 5 minutes of blending, 3 minutes of rhyming, 5 minutes of sounds (visual) and 5 minutes of take home materials.

4. Formats. The sounds to be identified by the children for example appear on sweaters and helmets of a row of football players, on the drums carried in a parade, on the cars of a railroad train, on the backs of circus animals etc.

The Reading Sounds pages have teacher instructions statements on the left half and words on arrows to be read on the right half.

The Blending notebook has the picture reward following the text.

5. Payoffs. Every task has a payoff. For knowing each sound, the child or the teacher crosses out that sound on the plastic coated sounds pages in the teacher notebook. Each day the child receives a page of the sound being taught to trace and then take home.

For working through the blending slow exercises, the children are rewarded by a high interest blending fast story. They are reminded, "The say it slow words are tough, but when you do a good job, I will read you a say it fast story, and then you will get to see the picture."

Success in reading the sounds as a group and then individually is rewarded by a take home story book with text on one page, picture on the next etc.

6. Instructional material and examples. All materials except the take homes are in the teacher notebooks. The chalkboard is not used because the teacher can control the group better when she always faces them, as she can when using a notebook on her lap.

7. Criterion tests. The program permits children to proceed at different rates. The below average children may proceed at half the rate of the "average" disadvantaged children and the higher performing children may complete the program in half the time.

The first part of a lesson in each teacher notebook every several days is a criterion test or "review" testing the specific materials taught in the preceding days. If more than one child in a group cannot pass, the group drops back and repeats several lessons in that notebook. This provides for children adept at oral blending but weak in symbol identification. The reading is keyed to the particular group's place in the sounds book.

Development of the materials. Engelmann and I write all the materials and the reading books and I teach these materials from teacher instructions to 4 groups of culturally deprived youngsters with I.Q.'s in the 75-100 range in our school at the University of Illinois. The materials are revised, reproduced, and sent by the publisher (5) to the 30 tryout teachers who are teaching reading to 1200 middle-class and disadvantaged children from first grades, kindergartens, nursery schools, second and third grade remedial classes, mentally and educationally handicapped youngsters with ages 3-14 represented in the field test population. The teachers complete objective and subjective evaluation sheets on each lesson and criterion test and the children will be tested in June, 1968.

Summary

Before mature reading can be attempted a child must devote considerable time in his first two years of reading instruction to mastery of the basic skills including those necessary to crack the code, and after reading starts, to the learning of more than one sound for many letter symbols and at least two symbols for each letter, how to handle irregular words, and how to attack new words by sound clues rather than by configurations.

By studying and working for five years with children with low mental ages, both middle-class and disadvantaged non-readers and reading failures we suggest an approach designed to buttress against many of the causes of reading troubles by keeping the information load light and the repetitions heavy.

The teachers in the field tryout attribute part of their success in teaching reading with this program to the direct instruction method, the kind of teaching upon which Distar is based, but which was not emphasized in their college methods courses.

My satisfaction has been in seeing so many potentially reading-troubled youngsters understand what reading is all about, and having teachers tell me that they now know that there was nothing wrong with them or with the children; it was just a function in the past of not zeroing in and focussing on the basic skills.

Footnotes

(1) Jeanne S. Chall, Learning to Read: The Great Debate (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), p. 307.

(2) Siegfried Engelmann, "Teaching Reading to Children with Low Mental Ages," Education of the Mentally Retarded, 1967, pp. 193-201.

(3) Elaine C. Bruner, "The Direct Instruction Program for Teaching Reading," in Richard Block et. al. Language Arts, proceedings of the Fourth International i.t.a. conference, 1968.

(4) Siegfried Engelmann and Elaine C. Bruner, Teaching Guide to Distar Reading Program, preliminary draft.

(5) Science Research Associates, division of IBM, 259 East Erie Street, Chicago 60611.